A PLAN FOR A MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR ALBERTA

FEBRUARY. 2005

RECOMMENDED BY: The Provincial Mental Health Research Plan Working Group

AMHB
ALBERTA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD
...Advancing Mental Health

105-07541/

The AMHB would like to thank the following members of the Provincial Mental Health Research Plan Working Group for their hard work, dedication and input into development of this Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta:

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Mr. Irv Zamrau, Provincial Board of Directors, Schizophrenia Society of Alberta

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Additional background information is also available in the following documents:

Background Report: Mental Health Research in Alberta – Context, Rationale, Current Resources and Opportunities
Background Report: Reflecting Input from Regional, Community and Research Community Forums
Background Report: Aboriginal Forum Summary Report

A MESSAGE

February 2005

From the Provincial Mental Health Research Plan Working Group

The members of the Provincial Mental Health Research Plan Working Group are pleased to present this ***Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta*** (the Plan). The Plan sets out a compelling and comprehensive vision for enhancing mental health research in the province and outlines specific actions to be taken towards its implementation.

The Plan builds on the direction for research outlined in the *Provincial Mental Health Plan* released in May 2004. Under the leadership, support and facilitation of the Alberta Mental Health Board, working in partnership with key stakeholders, the provincial Working Group was established. The group's objective was to collaboratively develop a comprehensive plan for a mental health research program in Alberta.

Members of the Working Group combined their diverse knowledge, perspectives and interests with extensive consultations with stakeholders across the province. A number of forums were held to hear first hand from the broadest communities of interest in mental health including successful mental health research organizations across Canada.

Throughout the consultations, the messages were clear. Research is critical to the advancement of mental health and the mental health system in Alberta. There is some excellent mental health research being conducted in Alberta and this research requires strong and deliberate coordination to link with policy and practice, e.g. translation of policy and practice issues to research questions and research evidence translated to policy and practice. Capacity building is necessary as Alberta lacks mental health research resources in health regions and within universities to address critical issues related to mental health and to provide an effective bridge between research, policy and practice.

Implementation will enable Alberta to become a world-class leader for mental health research. The Plan for a Mental Health Research Program in Alberta will support regional health authorities, policy-makers, service providers, and consumers to find, choose, and use mental health research to guide their decisions. It will enhance Alberta's capacity to undertake leading edge mental health research and promote innovation on an ongoing basis. The result will be better mental health outcomes for individual Albertans, families, and communities.

Partners in collaborative mental health research have already begun to align resources and coordinate their efforts to begin phased-in implementation of the Mental Health Research Program in 2005.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impact of mental illness is serious and pervasive

One in five Albertans will experience a mental illness in his or her lifetime. That ratio translates into 600,000 people, slightly less than the population of Edmonton.[1] But the numbers tell only part of the story. Mental illness has a pervasive impact on individuals, on families, on the workplace, and on all aspects of Alberta society. Combined with that, mental illness continues to be a largely "unspoken" illness, surrounded by persistent stigma. There is also little awareness of the progress that has been made in treating people so they can live productive and positive lives, which perpetuates this stigma.

To address these important issues, the *Provincial Mental Health Plan* describes a comprehensive new vision for mental health in Alberta, whereby mental illness becomes a top priority, people and families come first, and Albertans have access to the mental health services they need. As part of that vision, the need for an expanded, focused and coordinated mental health research plan for the province was highlighted.

On June 16, 2004, the Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) took the lead in initiating and facilitating the development of the Mental Health Research Program through organizing a Strategic Planning Day on Mental Health Research. Participants included a broad cross-section of the mental health and research communities in Alberta: Alberta Health and Wellness and other government ministries, regional health authorities, academic institutions, potential research sponsors, consumer advocates and mental health service providers.

Building on the achievements of the Strategic Planning Day, a provincial multi-stakeholder Working Group was established to address the challenge of developing a comprehensive Mental Health Research Program for Alberta. Members of the Working Group combined their diverse knowledge, perspectives and experience with extensive input from key stakeholders in mental health.

The result is this ***Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta***. The Plan makes a strong case for enhancing mental health research in Alberta. It proposes a new vision for mental health research, provides guiding principles, outlines anticipated outcomes and benefits, describes how a new program for mental health research could work, and details the next steps to be taken. Principles, goals and strategies focus on research priorities, research standards, a respect for diversity, partnerships and sustainable funding.

Most importantly, the focus is not simply on expanding research, but on choosing and using research to guide decisions, to improve programs and services, and to improve the outcomes for all those affected by mental illness in the province. The Mental Health Research Program will enable Alberta to become an international leader in mental health research, which will in turn improve the lives of thousands of Albertans who deal with the daily consequences of mental illness.

Research provides a critical contribution to improving outcomes

Early in 2005, Premier Klein reinforced the importance of addressing mental health as part of the provincial government's plan for renewing Alberta's health system. The Premier also indicated, "...with a new investment of $500 million into Alberta's Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, we'll take research to a whole new level."[2]

Further support comes from the Provincial Mental Health Plan, which highlights the central role research can and must play in improving mental health services and outcomes. "Excellence in mental health services depends on a strong commitment to research – research that informs and guides decisions, helps set priorities, improves outcomes for consumers, and supports ongoing innovation."[3]

[1] Advancing the Mental Health Agenda: A Provincial Mental Health Plan for Alberta. P. 5.

[2] Hon Klein R. *Alberta's celebration of the century. Premier's annual televised address to the province* [monograph on the Internet]. February 2005. Available from: http //www.gov.ab.ca/premier/centennial/Premaddress.pdf

[3] Advancing the Mental Health Agenda: A Provincial Mental Health Plan for Alberta. P. vii.

Research provides a critical contribution to improving outcomes continued...

Information reviewed by the Working Group indicates that:

- Current provincial mental health research needs to be coordinated and growth sufficient to meet Albertan's needs
- Mental health research must be as high a priority as other aspects of health research
- Funding for mental health research needs to reflect the impact of mental illness in our society
- Other provinces and countries have taken steps to integrate and expand mental health research but no comparable programs exist in Alberta
- Alberta needs to improve mechanisms for drawing individual mental health researchers together around common goals
- Research needs to be used to consistently guide decisions and continuously improve services and outcomes for people with mental illnesses

Opportunities and benefits of a Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta

Clearly, deliberate actions are needed to expand mental health research for the province, bridge the gap between research, practice, and policy and use research to continually improve services and outcomes. With a new Mental Health Research Program in place, Alberta has an opportunity to:

- Use mental health research to improve outcomes and mental health services for Albertans with mental illnesses, reduce the impact of mental illnesses, and improve the mental health of Albertans over the longer term
- Use research to address priority issues for consumers, people from various cultural backgrounds, and those involved in the mental health community
- Engage the diverse and growing Aboriginal communities in a collaborative partnership to address their mental health research priorities and determine outcomes
- Use mental health research effectively to improve mental health services for specific populations, including children, youth, Aboriginal people, forensic clients, hard to serve clients, and rural Albertans as well as other groups identified in the Provincial Mental Health Plan
- Develop a better understanding of the relationships among, determinants of health, health policy, mental health services, and population health in order to improve the health system by guiding management decisions and providing accountability mechanisms
- Fully integrate mental health research, program evaluation and quality improvement with mental health policy, service providers, health regions, consumers and community agencies and programs
- Be innovators in key areas such as knowledge translation and measurement of the impact of research
- Develop a collaborative mental health program for research in practice and evaluate the program over time to assess its impact on achieving the ultimate goal of improved mental health for Albertans
- Take a leadership role in performance measurement of the impact of mental health research on services
- Set clear priorities for mental health research and create innovative solutions through consultation, knowledge synthesis, and commissioned research
- Create synergies among researchers and practitioners, establish a focal point for attracting more researchers to the province, and align incentives to encourage researchers to collaborate and respond to priority needs
- Leverage the expertise of health research specialist organizations in Alberta and across the country
- Establish Alberta as a leading centre of mental health research, attract research resources from outside the province, and contribute positively to Alberta's goal of building a diverse, knowledge-based economy

A new vision for mental health research in Alberta

The Mental Health Research Program sets out the following vision for mental health research in the province:

Through a well integrated basic and translational mental health research program Alberta will be a world leader in advancing leading practice and innovation in order to improve mental health outcomes for individuals with mental illness and their families and to promote mental health for all Albertans.

The Program also describes a mission, expected outcomes to be achieved immediately and over the longer term, and guiding principles to be used in choosing specific research proposals. The principles address five key areas:

- **Focusing on research priorities** – Advancing the ultimate outcome of improved mental health of Albertans by achieving a balance of strategic and investigator-initiated research
- **Striving for excellence** – Upholding the highest standards for research and research related activities, with high requisites for scientific rigor and systematic standards
- **Respectful of diversity** – Sensitive to the dignity of the individual, irrespective of cultural identity, social status, gender, age, or diagnosis
- **Fostering strategic partnerships** – Bridging academia, service organizations, consumers, care providers and policy makers
- **Sustainability of funding** – Stable, sustainable, protected, accountable funding and resources, aligned with strategic priorities

A new program for mental health research

The Mental Health Research Program describes a comprehensive new program for mental health research in the province that addresses the following key questions:

- **What are the key priorities for mental health research in the province?** – Reflecting the priorities for support and treatment, risk reduction, and capacity building identified in the *Provincial Mental Health Plan* and providing mechanisms for assessing needs and adjusting province-wide mental health research priorities on an ongoing basis
- **What needs to be done?** – Outlining key research functions related to coordination and linkages; knowledge transfer and bridging the research/practice/policy gap; consultation services; establishing, enhancing and maintaining research capacity in service settings; enhancing academic mental health research capacity; and research production
- **What are the key components of a mental health research program?** – Establishing, enhancing and maintaining capacity in service settings, enhancing capacity for mental health research in academic institutions, and establishing capacity to disseminate research knowledge, conduct sponsored research, provide consultation services, and build linkages and partnerships
- **How should a mental health program be established and organized?** – Outlining the essential features of how the necessary functions should be organized along with ensuring appropriate accountability
- **How could the implementation of a mental health research program be structured?** – Proposing the establishment of a new Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health and outlining the requirements for appropriate leadership, advisory and coordination functions
- **How would funding be provided?** – Establishing the need for a dedicated Mental Health Research Fund, outlining how funds would be allocated, and outlining the role of key stakeholders in contributing to mental health research in the province

Next steps

The Plan identifies the need for a phased-in implementation process, including a start-up phase where essential detailed work would be done to establish the Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health. AMHB has committed to continuing in its leadership role to coordinate and implement this Research Program effective April 1, 2005. Funding would be required on an annual basis to fully implement the Mental Health Research Program.

With a clear Mental Health Research Program in place, the continuing commitment of key stakeholders, and dedicated mental health research funding, members of the Working Group are confident that this Plan will result in better outcomes for people with mental illness, and better mental health for all Albertans.

INTRODUCTION

Provincial Mental Health Plan sets the direction

"The *Provincial Mental Health Plan* outlines a comprehensive vision for the future of mental health in Alberta. The vision includes the following key requirements:

- Clients and their families will come first
- Albertans will have access to the mental health services they need
- There will be an appropriate balance between providing treatment and taking action to prevent mental illness and promoting positive mental health
- Mental health services will be integrated and coordinated
- Albertans will have access to leading edge mental health services
- Responsibilities and accountability for outcomes will be clear
- Funding for mental health services will be adequate, equitable and fair
- There will be an adequate supply of well-trained people working in mental health
- A strong commitment to research will put Alberta at the forefront of innovation and improvement in mental health
- Effective partnerships will support mental health services
- Albertans will understand and support the importance of positive mental health"[4]

As part of that vision, the need for an expanded, focused, and coordinated mental health research plan for the province was highlighted. As noted in the Provincial Plan, "Excellence in mental health services depends on a strong commitment to research – research that informs and guides decisions, helps set priorities, improves outcomes for consumers, and supports ongoing innovation."[5]

The Provincial Plan specifically highlighted the following strategic priorities related to mental health research:

- The capacity of regional health authorities to conduct or access research to guide regional decisions and priorities should be developed or expanded
- Academic institutions should expand their ability to support collaborative, applied research in mental health
- Partnerships should be established in all research areas, including targeted research on mental health issues specific to Aboriginal people
- A dedicated fund should be established to address the need for increased, sustained and targeted support for mental health research
- Enhancements in mental health research should be balanced across the four pillars of research: basic, clinical, health services, and population health (including mental health population surveillance)

With a comprehensive Mental Health Research Program in place, Alberta has an opportunity to become an international leader in mental health research. And most importantly, we can make much better use of research to guide decisions, improve outcomes for consumers and their families, and address the longer-term vision of promoting positive mental health in the province.

[4] Advancing the Mental Health Agenda: A Provincial Mental Health Plan for Alberta, P. ii.
[5] Ibid, p.4

Mental Health Research Plan Working Group established

The *Provincial Mental Health Plan* implementation strategy requires the Alberta Mental Health Board to provide "specific provincial leadership, collaboration, coordination and support activities in ... mental health research planning and coordination".[5] Specifically, the AMHB was asked to "initiate, coordinate and facilitate multi-stakeholder collaboration to address the following specific priorities:

- Engaging the academic community in developing cooperative and collaborative partnerships
- Developing and maintaining a network of research funding partnerships with external funding sources
- Including the research community, the Provincial Mental Health Information Management Committee, regional health authorities and Alberta Health and Wellness (and consumers – added by the Provincial Mental Health Research Plan Working Group) in identifying the health system information management infrastructure required to support the implementation of mental health research priorities
- Developing collaborative research and evaluation partnerships with other ministries and governments involved in cross-ministerial and inter-governmental mental health initiatives
- Reporting periodically on progress in implementation of the Mental Health Research Plan"[5]

The AMHB began the process by convening a Mental Health Research Strategic Planning Day on June 16, 2004. A broad cross section of stakeholders from the mental health and mental health research communities contributed their expertise. The recommendations from the Strategic Planning Day provided the starting point for more detailed planning.

To take the next step, the AMHB established a working group with a diverse mix of participants from regional health authorities, the AMHB, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, several government departments, the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, and the Alberta Medical Association. The Working Group was challenged to collaboratively develop a mental health research plan for Alberta that:

- Supports and encourages ongoing innovation in mental health services
- Focuses on how to facilitate and support research on an ongoing basis across the province
- Ensures an appropriate balance among the four pillars of research – population-based, health service, clinical, and basic research – recognizing that each has a unique and important role to play in the advancement of mental health

Supported by the AMHB, the Working Group combined their diverse knowledge, perspectives and interests to address that challenge. Comprehensive background information was prepared, including a review of mental health research in Canada, current mental health research initiatives in Alberta, partnership initiatives to support research, and mental health research programs in other provinces and countries. A summary of that information is included in *Background Report: Mental Health Research in Alberta – Context, Rationale, Current Resources and Opportunities*.

The Working Group also arranged a number of forums across the province. The forums included service providers, consumers, multidisciplinary academics, regional health authorities and individuals from community agencies and programs, Aboriginal organizations as well as government ministries, and individuals involved in Aboriginal research. Two working papers *(Background Report: Reflecting Input from Regional, Community and Research Community Forums and Background Report: Aboriginal Forum Summary Report)* provide a summary of the input received through the forums. The Working Group also had input from successful mental health research organizations across Canada.

[5] Ibid, p. 54.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A FOCUSED MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR ALBERTA

The *Provincial Mental Health Plan* highlighted the critical role research can and must play in achieving the vision for mental health in the province. Further work undertaken by the Working Group confirms not only the need to increase capacity for mental health research and its application in the province, but also the opportunity for Alberta to take a lead in mental health research and achieve important benefits for consumers, their families, our economy, and our society as a whole.

The impact of mental illness

Recent studies are beginning to shed more light on the impact of mental illness and the importance of prevention, promotion, and early intervention on individuals and their families, on our society, and in the workplace. A study commissioned for the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank found that five of the ten leading causes of disability for people aged five years and older are mental disorders. The study predicts that the disease burden attributable to neuropsychiatric illness will increase from just under 11% in 1990 to at least 15% by 2020.[7] These projections were substantiated by the 2000 Global Burden of Disease study, which documented an increase to 12.5% in 2000.[8] This is a bigger proportionate increase than for cardiovascular disease. In Canada, estimates are that at least 2% of the population has severe and persistent mental illnesses[9] while an additional 18% suffers from less serious mental health problems.[10] Mental health problems are among the most costly groups of health conditions. In 2002, the costs of directly funded mental health services in Alberta (including only hospital, clinic and physician costs) were estimated at $573 million or about 8.4% of provincial health services.[11] Across Canada, the total national burden of mental illness is estimated at $14.4 billion (in 1998 dollars) including health care services as well as societal costs such as lost productivity, disability and early death.[12] Moreover, this cost extends to the immeasurable impact that mental health problems have on children and families coping with mental illness.

Mental illness also has a serious impact in the workplace. Productivity losses in Canada have been estimated at $4.5 billion a year and 30% of disability claims are attributed to mental illness.[13]

One in five Albertans seek help for a mental illness because it interferes with their day-to-day functions. This is important to note as there are many unmeasured effects of mental illness, e.g., the effect on family members, the effects of depression that has similar effects to that of a myocardinal infarct, in addition to the interaction between individuals with mental illness and the justice system. "There are variations in rates of different types of mental illness across the province. In all regions, however, there are gaps in access to the treatment people need."[14] Alberta's injury and suicide rates are among the highest in Canada.[15]

Mental health research can play a critical role

Clearly, mental illness has a serious impact on all aspects of Alberta society. As noted in the *Provincial Mental Health Plan*, that impact must be addressed by expanding services across the province and ensuring that consumers and their families have access to comprehensive mental health services.

At the same time, research has a critically important role to play. The World Health Organization's *World Health Report 2001 – Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope* concludes that "the burden of mental and behavioral disorders will only be reduced if effective interventions are developed and disseminated."[16] The report identified an urgent need for all types of research, but placed a particular emphasis on "implementation or dissemination research into those factors likely to enhance the uptake and utilization of effective interventions in the community."[17]

[7] World Health Organization web site: www.who.org/mentalhealth.
[8] World Health Organization. The global burden of disease: A response to the need for comprehensive, consistent and comparable global information on diseases and injuries [monograph on the Internet]. Available from: http://www.who.int/msp/2003/other_documents/en/globalburdenofdisease.pdf
[9] Goldner EM. Summary Information and Research Findings on Mental Illness in Canada. A CAMIMH Report for the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2001).
[10] Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Network on Mental Health and Health Canada. *Best Practices in Mental Health Reform*. Discussion paper. 1997
[11] Block R, Slomp M, Jacobs P, Ohinmaa A. The direct public sector costs for mental health in Alberta (unpublished manuscript November 2004)
[12] Stephens T, Joubert N. The economic burden of mental health problems in Canada. *Chronic Diseases in Canada* 2001; 22(1): 18 – 23.
[13] Longwoods Healthcare Papers. Special Issue: Mental illness in the workplace [monograph on the Internet]. 2004, 5(2). Available from: http://longwoods.com/hp/5-2MentalHealth/HP52Mental.pdf
[14] Health Quality Council of Alberta. *Health report to Albertans 2004: Measuring up* [monograph on the Internet]. 2004. P.2. Available from: http://www.hqca.ca/
[15] Ibid. p .7.
[16] The World Health Organization (2001). The World Health Report 2001: Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope. P.104.
[17] Ibid

In short, mental health research can help identify which interventions work the best, which ones don't, and why. Breakthrough research discoveries in the past are clearly benefiting people who experience mental illness today. Mood stabilizers, antidepressants and evidence-based psychotherapies, and antipsychotics are now allowing people to lead productive lives, managed through outpatient clinics and doctors' offices, where lengthy inpatient stays might once have been required. There is, however, much more to learn through basic science and health research to continue to improve outcomes and people's lives. Additionally, research is required to guide decisions made by policy makers, regional health authorities and service providers. It is needed to explore trends and the underlying causes of specific mental illnesses. And, it should guide initiatives and actions to prevent mental illness and promote positive mental health over the longer term.

In fact, research, as well as its application in supporting evidence-based decision making, is essential for continuous quality improvement in all aspects of delivering services and improving outcomes for consumers. However, as highlighted in the following section, no consolidated mental health research effort currently exists in Alberta. Without a coordinated focal point for mental health research in the province, it is unlikely that significant progress can be made on addressing mental health issues and improving outcomes for consumers.

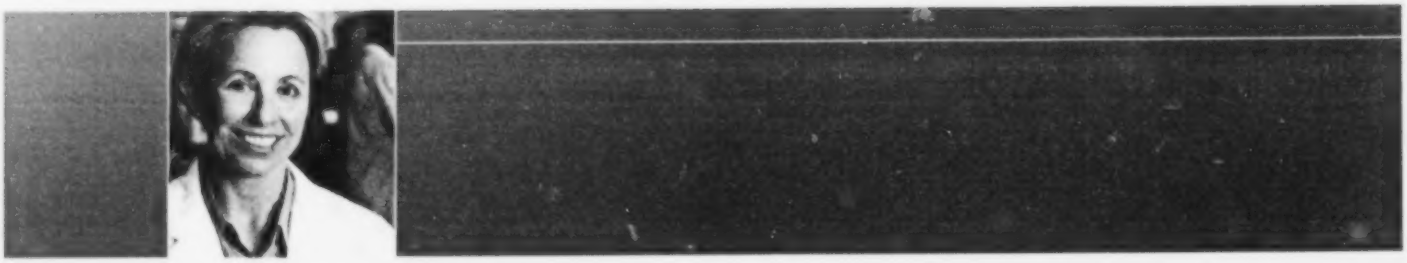
The current situation for mental health research in Alberta

Alberta has developed an international reputation for excellence in clinical and biomedical research, largely as a result of support from the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. Significant health-related research is also funded through the Alberta Cancer Board, Alberta Health and Wellness, and Alberta Innovation and Science. A number of general health partnership initiatives are also in place. (*Background Report: Mental Health Research in Alberta – Context, Rationale, Current Resources and Opportunities* provides further information on these and other research initiatives).

In mental health research, Alberta currently has an active contingent of researchers in biomedical, clinical research, mental health services research and population health research in its universities, colleges and larger health regions. Several leading researchers in the province have attracted new funding from national sources (*Background Report: Mental Health Research in Alberta – Context, Rationale, Current Resources and Opportunities* provides examples). A number of centres also provide a focus on different aspects of mental health research. Examples include:

- The Hotchkiss Brain Institute at the University of Calgary, in partnership with the Calgary Health Region and the University of Lethbridge, has a specific mission to advance research in neuroscience and mental health
- The Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta has recently been designated as a WHO/PAHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing and Mental Health
- A new Mental Health Population Research Interest Group has been formed at the University of Calgary and includes a group of 15 researchers active in population mental health and/or mental health services and policy research
- The University of Calgary is slated to be the fourth site for the Research in Addictions and Mental Health Policy and Services (RAMHPS) program funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research
- At the University of Alberta, established basic science/clinical research teams in the Department of Psychiatry include the Neurochemical Research Unit, the Psychopharmacology Research Unit, the Bebensee Research Unit (and affiliated Edmonton Early Psychosis Intervention Clinic) and research groups in bipolar disorder, psychotherapy and epidemiology

Within health regions and community agencies and programs, there are some excellent examples of service-based research and evaluation. That includes the recent evaluation of the Diversion program (funded by the Health Innovation Fund and the AMHB) which examined the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of a new service model, and the development of a research function for the Centre for Suicide Prevention. It also includes organizations such as the Nechi Institute for Training Research and Health Promotions that is recognized internationally for its research work in addictions and other areas of mental health, particularly in relation to Aboriginal people.



The current situation for mental health research in Alberta continued...

In spite of these developments and Alberta's successful record for health research, mental health research has not been as high a priority as other aspects of health research. Information included in the *Background Report: Mental Health Research in Alberta – Context, Rationale, Current Resources and Opportunities* indicates that:

- Funding for mental health research does not reflect the impact of mental illness in our society
- Other aspects of health are a higher priority and receive more funding than mental health research
- Other provinces (e.g. Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia) and countries have recognized the importance of integrating and expanding mental health research and have taken steps to establish foundations, institutes, networks, and specialized units to coordinate and expand mental health research. No comparable programs exist in Alberta
- Alberta does not have effective mechanisms for drawing individual mental health researchers together around common goals. In fact, the work of mental health researchers has been relatively fragmented and only minimally linked with service delivery
- There are significant gaps between what research has shown to be optimal treatments and what many people receive in actual practice settings
- Regional health authorities differ in their capacity for applying research and conducting evaluations
- Effective processes and mechanisms to disseminate mental health research do not exist

Opportunities and benefits of a Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta

The impact of mental illness is significant for individual Albertans, families, communities, and our society as a whole. At the same time, there are clear gaps in our capacity to channel targeted research to address this challenge. In addition to the considerable benefits to individual health and to the health system, building mental health research capacity will also have economic benefits for Alberta's society.

Alberta has many of the essential building blocks for establishing world-class mental health research capacity in the province. What is lacking is a common vision for mental health research and a coordinated research plan for achieving that vision.

A Mental Health Research Program will provide Alberta with the opportunity to:

- Improve outcomes for people with mental illnesses in the province, reduce the impact of mental illness, and improve the mental health of Albertans over the longer term
- Integrate mental health research and evaluation programs with mental health policy and the practice of service providers, health regions, community agencies and programs, as well as the needs of consumers, through an integrated research plan
- Be innovators in key areas such as knowledge translation and measurement of the impact of research
- Develop a new program for research in practice and evaluate the program over time to assess its impact on achieving the ultimate goal of improved mental health for Albertans
- Take a leadership role in performance measurement
- Set clear priorities for mental health research and offer more innovative synthesis, consultation and commissioned types of research
- Create synergies among researchers and practitioners, create a focal point for attracting more researchers to the province, and align incentives to encourage researchers to collaborate and respond to priority needs
- Leverage the expertise of health research specialist organizations in Alberta and across the country
- Provide a leading edge bridge between research, practice and policy
- Use research to address priority issues for consumers, people from various cultural backgrounds, and those involved in the mental health community
- Engage the diverse and growing Aboriginal community in a collaborative partnership to address their mental health research priorities and improve outcomes
- Establish Alberta as a leading centre of mental health research, attract research resources from outside the province, and contribute positively to Alberta's goal of building a diverse, knowledge-based economy

A NEW VISION FOR MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH IN ALBERTA

The need and the potential benefits of a targeted, comprehensive Mental Health Research Program for Alberta are clear.

Vision and mission

The Mental Health Research Program for Alberta is designed to achieve the following vision:

Through a well integrated basic and translational mental health research program Alberta will be a world leader in advancing leading practice and innovation in order to improve mental health outcomes for individuals with mental illness and their families and to promote mental health for all Albertans.

The vision will be achieved by:

- Establishing productive and innovative partnerships and joint ventures involving mental health care providers, post-secondary institutions, consumers, communities and community agencies and programs, public sector and government organizations, professional health organizations, and private business to advance research and innovation
- Working in partnership with culturally diverse communities, including Aboriginal peoples, to address their mental health priorities
- Creating new knowledge in mental health service delivery, prevention of mental illness and promotion of mental health, and discovering new treatments
- Disseminating and increasing the use of new knowledge and evidence
- Using evidence provided through research and evaluation to guide decisions, set priorities, and promote innovation in improving clinical practice and delivering health services
- Attracting world-class researchers and clinicians

The mission for the Mental Health Research Program for Alberta is:

To improve the mental health of Albertans by fostering excellence in mental health research, enabling the transfer of evidence into practice, encouraging innovation, and sharing wisdom among communities.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

As work on the Mental Health Research Program proceeds, a number of key outcomes can be achieved both in the immediate sense and over the longer term. One of the most critical overall outcomes is the opportunity to use mental health research to guide decisions, improve services and improve outcomes for people with mental illnesses.

Immediate outcomes

- A clear commitment to mental health research in Alberta with targeted funding and mechanisms for facilitating and funding research in priority areas
- A mental health research program that expands mental health research capacity in the province and supports evidence-based decision making in health regions
- Formal and informal linkages that encourage research dissemination and uptake between researchers, policy makers, consumers, and service providers
- Clear roles and responsibilities and appropriate accountability mechanisms of the various stakeholders in mental health research
- Needs and priorities of Alberta's mental health system that are reflected in the design and funding of mental health research, and researchers collaborate with service providers, policy makers, health professional organizations, consumers, and communities
- Mental health research that is adapted to and respectful of cultural diversity and history
- Support and encouragement of trans-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary mental health research in Alberta
- An increase in mental health research activity in Alberta
- Developed and enhanced capacity of health regions to undertake mental health research and evaluation and use evidence to guide decisions and continuously improve quality

Intermediate outcomes

- Implementation of leading and best practices in mental health throughout the health system
- The four pillars of mental health research are balanced, integrated and contribute to the mental health system in Alberta and to the mental health of Albertans
- An increase in the number of world-class mental health researchers through recruitment and development of researchers specializing in applied research, in Alberta as a result of funding for new research projects, faculty positions, studentships and fellowships
- Collaborative strategies and networks in place to bridge the gap between research and practice
- Participation by Aboriginal people and other diverse cultural groups in mental health research, and their experience with mental health research is collaborative, respectful, and has a positive impact on their communities
- Processes and mechanisms are in place to provide for methodologically sound evaluation of mental health outcomes

Ultimate outcomes

- Innovation in mental health policy, clinical practice, and service delivery contributes significantly to the improvement of the mental health of Albertans
- Individuals with mental illness and their families have improved mental health outcomes, and Albertans experience positive mental health compared with other jurisdictions
- Mental health research, clinical practice, and service delivery is world-renowned and leading edge
- There is improved satisfaction among those who work in the mental health system as well as consumers, families and communities
- Capacity is in place in all regions to find, choose, and use research
- Alberta's Plan for a Mental Health Research Program provides a model for other jurisdictions and helps attract leading mental health researchers to Alberta
- There are significant improvements at the mental health system level (e.g. stronger linkages between government initiatives, agencies and ministries, etc.) that also positively impact on social determinants of mental health. (e.g. Education, socioeconomic status, employment status, poverty, etc.)
- The creation of a fund to support endowed chairs in mental health research at the universities in Alberta

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles were developed to guide the choice of specific research projects and help ensure that mental health funding remains a high priority in Alberta.

Provincial mental health research guiding principles

Focusing on Research Priorities ***Advancing the ultimate outcome of improved mental health of Albertans by achieving a balance of strategic and investigator-initiated research***	• Research will be relevant to producers and users and address population needs; strategic choices will focus on identified clinical, service delivery and practice issues reflecting client needs and improving mental health services for Albertans. • Processes and services will support an evolution toward an evidence-based culture in determining best practices and policy-making. • Research will be appropriately balanced, both across the scientific spectrum (biomedical, clinical, health services, and population health) and across the treatment continuum.
Striving for Excellence ***Upholding the highest standards for research related activities, with high requisites for scientific rigor and systematic standards***	• Innovative advances including developmental or exploratory projects with high potential for ultimate benefit will be supported. • Widespread, accessible data sets will be universally reported wherever possible to ensure they add to an existing common body of knowledge. • Rapid response will be emphasized to guide decision-makers regarding time-sensitive issues. • Research activities will meet the highest ethical standards as per the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS).
Respectful of Diversity ***Sensitive to the dignity of the individual, irrespective of cultural identity, social status, gender, age, ethnicity, or diagnosis***	• The perspective of research participants will have high value. • Inclusive and participatory approaches will be encouraged with a wide variety of cultural groups and communities. • Research related to Aboriginal mental health will be developed in partnership with their communities to ensure that it reflects and honours the Aboriginal linguistic and historical legacy, cultural protocols, ethics, beliefs, and ways of knowing.
Fostering Strategic Partnerships ***Bridging academia, service organizations, consumers, care providers and policy makers***	• Collaborations that span research disciplines, geographic and administrative boundaries, and consider multiple perspectives (including those of community agencies and programs) will have top priority. • Partnerships of mutual benefit with existing programs will be promoted. • Partnerships will be created to bridge the traditional gaps between research and practice.
Sustainability of Funding ***Stable, sustainable, protected, accountable funding and resources, aligned with strategic priorities***	• Regions will maintain autonomy in setting research priorities and allocating research funding within their respective regions. • Research planning, development, and priority setting will optimize the use of resources, with existing structures used to fulfill roles and responsibilities and avoid duplication of services. • Evaluation processes will be regularly reported to ensure accountability.

A NEW PROGRAM FOR MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH IN ALBERTA

In order to enhance Alberta's mental health research capacity and achieve the vision outlined in the previous section, a new program is required. The program addresses the following key questions:

- What are the key priorities for mental health research in the province?
- What needs to be done? (outlining key functions of a mental health program for the province)
- What are the key components of a mental health research program?
- How should a mental health research program be established and organized?
- How could the implementation of a mental health research program be structured?
- How would funding be provided?

What are the key priorities for mental health research in the province?

The *Provincial Mental Health Plan* identified a number of important priorities where action is needed to improve access to a full range of mental health services and supports and to improve outcomes for Albertans. The specific priorities fall into the following categories:

- Support and treatment – providing assessment, treatment, rehabilitation and community support for individuals and families
- Risk reduction – reducing the risk of mental illness and optimizing mental health by decreasing factors that negatively affect well-being including physical illness, poverty, abuse or chronic neglect, violence, addictions, trauma, or harsh social conditions
- Capacity building – identifying, maintaining and strengthening factors that promote mental health and well being across government, in communities, and with individuals and their families

These priorities should be reflected in and guide province-wide priorities for mental health research. During the consultation process for developing the Mental Health Research Program, a number of key priorities, also addressed in the *Provincial Mental Health Plan*, were identified. Some of these priorities included children and youth, Aboriginal mental health, geriatrics, housing, and rural mental health-related issues.

On an ongoing basis, it is expected that:

- Appropriate mechanisms would be in place for ongoing assessment of needs and adjustment of province-wide mental health research priorities. Those mechanisms would ensure active participation of consumers, Aboriginal communities, and all other key stakeholders in mental health and mental health research.
- Regional health authorities would continue to develop their own priorities for mental health research in their regions based on their unique needs and input from their respective communities.

What needs to be done?

A number of key research functions are necessary to fill the gaps identified in mental health research in Alberta today, to facilitate evidence-based decision making, and to achieve the vision and expected outcomes outlined in the Mental Health Research Program.

Research functions

- **Coordination and linkages**

  There is a clear need to coordinate mental health research and encourage collaboration. This function would bring together academia, service managers, decision makers, consumers, representatives from Aboriginal and multi-cultural communities, and policy makers on a collective research agenda. It would represent a new, progressive and innovative model of an integrated and coordinated research enterprise. A research/practice network and an annual research showcase would provide a vital mechanism for communication and for sharing information about existing academic and practice activities, available funding, etc. Extensive inter-regional, inter-provincial, national and international linkages and brokering would be critical. That would include linkages with cross-ministry initiatives of government, various initiatives under the *Provincial Mental Health Plan*, clinicians, community agencies and programs, federal-provincial initiatives, the private sector, pharmacists and the pharmaceutical industry, other health-related sectors, and the National Mental Health Strategy. New ways of linking with industry, building partnerships, and fostering/facilitating strategic partnerships would be critical.

- **Knowledge transfer and bridging the research/practice gap**

  One of the key functions is to bridge the gap between research, practice and policy and enhance the capacity of regional health authorities, service providers and consumers to use evidence to guide their decisions and services. This function would encourage the development of a research "culture" through the use of existing knowledge to optimize mental health and mental health services. The emphasis on practice-based, applied research is paramount, but innovative, investigator-driven research would not be excluded. A readily accessible clearinghouse of existing best practice information would be developed to enhance research use. Strategic linkages would be established with organizations that have expertise in knowledge transfer, evidence-based practice and other types of general health research. Research-related information would be directly accessible to the practice community as well as through consultation and linkage services.

- **Consultation services**

  Practitioners, regional and community program managers, community agencies and programs, consumer groups, Aboriginal communities, diverse cultural groups, researchers and policy-makers need access to practical advice and support to address important practice-related questions and develop research projects and proposals. This function would provide relatively rapid responses to practice and policy questions through quick reviews of evidence, research syntheses and occasionally through commissioned research. It would also assist with proposal development, research design, research ethics and other topics specific to mental health research. Assistance would be provided for both traditional and applied research projects (i.e. evaluation of programs and services). Where appropriate, existing services (e.g. Health Technology Assessment) will be used (e.g. to address generic methodological questions or questions appropriate for systematic technology assessment).

- **Establishing, enhancing and maintaining capacity in service settings**

  Regional health authorities (RHAs), practitioners, region-based researchers, policy developers, and community service providers need opportunities to improve their skills in generating, finding, using and applying research. The objective is to develop and maintain a culture of evidence-based practice within RHAs. This function would address that objective through initiatives to build and maintain capacity in RHAs, support innovation, undertake applied research projects, support coordinated training opportunities, and organize special events. Topics and content would be set according to the needs of participants.

  Collaborative funding and planning processes and mechanisms need to be established for RHAs to access to address their unique priorities for the establishment, enhancement and maintenance of mental health research capacity. Funding would be available to RHAs to implement their plans, through initiatives such as: specialized staffing; development of infrastructure and/or systems; organization development (e.g., in-service workshops to develop a culture of evidence based practice); building linkages and research partnerships with community agencies and programs, other regions and academic researchers; as well as the design, implementation and evaluation of regional research and innovation projects.

  Collaboration among the regions and economies of scale would be encouraged. For example, existing training opportunities and mechanisms would be used wherever appropriate and feasible. Province-wide initiatives could include a special mental health SEARCH program, the annual research day in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary, periodic telehealth workshops, and special workshops offered in conjunction with the annual mental health research showcase.

- **Enhancing capacity for mental health research in academic institutions**

  Action is needed to develop and maintain excellence in academic mental health research and to enhance the current capacity in academic institutions. This would include enhancing research personnel capacity through salary awards available to post-secondary and region-based researchers (e.g. regular academic salaries, studentships and clinical fellowships, postdoctoral fellowships and awards to protect research time for mental health professionals whose primary role is not research). Funds would be allocated through peer-review processes according to strategic priorities and with attention paid to recruitment and retention of high quality investigators from out of province. Practice and policy collaborations would be encouraged through incentives supporting practice-based practica as part of the criteria for scientific review. Steps would be taken to change academic incentives that dissuade researchers from doing practice and community-based studies. Enhancing academic capacity could also include infrastructure, support staffing, and systems development.

- **Research production**

  Expanded research is required on a wide range of mental health issues. Primary research would be encouraged on priority questions through both regular operating grants and strategically commissioned research. Emphasis would be placed on research in high opportunity/priority areas, including innovative, investigator-driven research and policy-related research. Innovative research and evaluation projects in practice settings and leveraging/matching of research grant sources would be encouraged.

What are the key components of a mental health research program?

An integrated mental health research program for the province should focus on key components: establishing, enhancing and maintaining mental health research capacity in health regions; enhancing capacity for mental health research in academic institutions; and establishing capacity to disseminate research knowledge, conduct sponsored research, provide consultation services, and build linkages and partnerships.

Establishing, enhancing and maintaining capacity in service settings

The objective is to support RHAs in developing, enhancing and maintaining the necessary organization, systems, partnerships, people, and processes to create, choose, and use research evidence. Because health authorities need the flexibility and freedom to set their own priorities, the requirements for innovation and establishing, enhancing and maintaining mental health research capacity will be uniquely defined in each health region.

Targeted funds should be available to support innovation and capacity building in health regions. This would include funding provided to RHAs as well as to community agencies and programs and other organizations that provide mental health services in partnership with the health regions. Joint action, cross-regional capacity-building projects will be strongly supported. Regions would be expected to survey needs in their respective regions; actively involve consumers, Aboriginal and multicultural communities, and community agencies and programs; and prepare proposals that address their region's specific priorities and needs. Regions would also be accountable for the use of funds for specific projects.

Three elements of funding should be available:

- **Capacity building/enhancing fund** – to support the choice and use of research in health regions, to facilitate evidence-based decision making, and to support building, enhancing, or maintaining a region's base capacity for conducting applied research. Capacity building initiatives would be varied but examples include:

  Time release for service providers to write proposals and participate in research and evaluation projects

  Opportunities for education, participation in SEARCH, training in research processes, accessing research databases, and library services

  Networking and participating in the Mental Health Research Network (Research Transfer Network of Alberta (RTNA), and SEARCH networks could serve as models) or in communities of practice encouraging multi-disciplinary exchanges and linkages with academic partners and other health regions to share best practices, enhance opportunities for connections and provide motivation to explore and innovate

- **Innovation projects** – to promote innovation in research and service delivery, particularly in areas that might be overlooked because of methods or current knowledge being high risk 'ideas' in research competitions of other funding organizations. This would include both innovative collaborative projects and seed funding for collaborative proposal development. It also would include the use of alternate and indigenous methodologies and Aboriginal ways of knowing. Projects will be expected to include an evaluation component. Cross-regional and research/practice collaborative projects involving regions and academia would be encouraged.

- **Investigator-driven research** – to enable regional health authority researchers and practitioners to engage in specific research projects to address needs and improve mental health outcomes in their region.

Specific mechanisms and guidelines for allocating funds, determining priorities, assessing proposals, providing peer review, approving specific proposals, and monitoring outcomes will be developed as part of the start-up phase of implementation of the Mental Health Research Program.

Enhancing capacity for mental health research in academic institutions

Capacity for mental health research in universities and other post-secondary institutions would be enhanced through targeted funding in three key areas:

- **Operating grants** – to support the establishment of dedicated funding for mental health research in Alberta post-secondary institutions
- **Research projects** – to fund both investigator-initiated and commissioned research in strategic priority areas and to increase the volume of mental health research in the province
- **Personnel awards** – to support faculty positions, studentships, clinical fellowships, and post-doctoral fellowships and to establish a critical mass of researchers in the province

The objective is to enhance the capacity in academic institutions through a "value added" investment in mental health research. A peer-reviewed project fund would allow for leveraging of research grants from other sources. Studentships and fellowships would attract leading mental health researchers and produce researchers who are capable of attracting funding from other sources. Operating grants dedicated to mental health research would help build basic capacity in post-secondary institutions. One of the objectives is to establish longer-term endowed Mental Health Research Chairs at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. Together, these innovations will result in a more competitive, comprehensive and higher profile for mental health research in Alberta.

How should a mental health research program be established and organized?

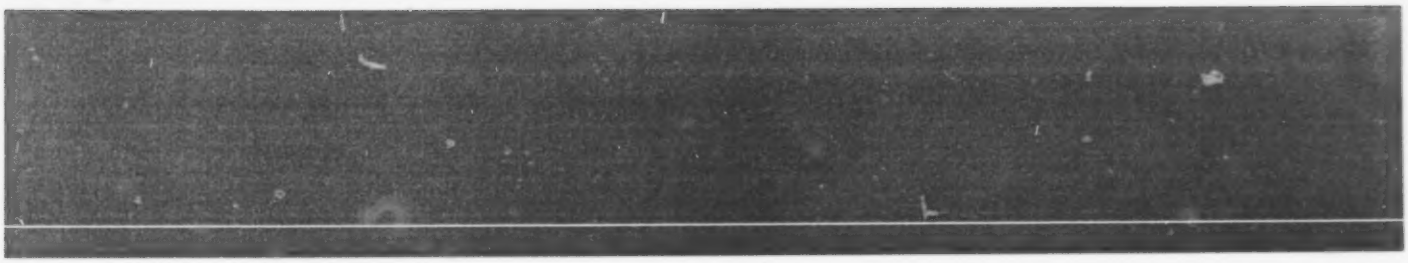
The Working Group reviewed approaches used by other jurisdictions and organizations to effectively bridge academic research with practice, policy and service delivery. Also considered was the advice of stakeholders and the accountability framework outlined in the *Provincial Mental Health Plan.*

Based on that review, the following key features should be included in an appropriate organizational structure for developing and implementing a mental health research program in the province:

- Effective coordination of mental health research requires an identifiable "research centre" with a specific focus on implementing an integrated Mental Health Research Program
- Effective mechanisms should be in place to provide active involvement and participation of consumers and all key stakeholders in mental health and mental health research
- The research centre should include a dedicated, academic, university-affiliated research unit in order to conduct world-class research and in order to marshal the expertise required to provide effective research advice to guide practice and policy. An academic unit will help to maintain the credibility needed to attract financial support from out-of-province and provincial sources
- Effective processes should be in place to facilitate and expedite access and reduce barriers to mental health research funding
- Existing resources currently committed to the support of mental health research should be coordinated effectively in order to realize potential efficiencies and avoid any unnecessary duplication of resources and costs
- The division of roles and responsibilities should be guided by the *Provincial Mental Health Plan*
- The network of inter-organizational partnerships required for implementing a Mental Health Research Program should be open and flexible enough to accommodate additional funding partners (e.g. other provinces and the private sector) in initiatives that advance mental health in Alberta through research

An appropriate accountability framework is also important, especially given the need to establish clear priorities, measure performance, and assess progress on an ongoing basis. The accountability framework for a mental health research program should address the following requirements:

- Roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved should be guided by the accountability framework outlined in the Provincial Mental Health Plan
- Opportunities for participation by consumer organizations (including culturally distinct populations), and service providers in setting priorities and in applied research should be created at the local, regional and provincial levels
- Aboriginal peoples should be involved in all aspects of the research process, including priority setting, for any research that impacts their communities
- The authority of each regional health authority to establish and address its unique priorities for developing and maintaining regional mental health research capacity should be respected
- All stakeholders should collaborate in the design of processes to determine how regions would access research funds, how projects would be selected, and how funds for projects would be administered on an ongoing basis
- Agreements among organizations involved in implementing the mental health research program should include a clear definition of respective roles and responsibilities, as well as a definition of mechanisms for shared accountability
- Alberta Health and Wellness, working with the AMHB, should be responsible for concluding appropriate agreements with other ministries and other governments
- A performance measurement framework should be developed and implemented
- The accountability framework should be clearly defined and communicated



How could the implementation of a mental health research program be structured?

The AMHB, RHAs, academic institutions, consumer organizations, and other key stakeholders all have important roles to play in ensuring that key mental health research functions are undertaken on an ongoing basis. The key is to establish appropriate mechanisms and structures to ensure that the necessary action is taken to enhance mental health research in the province and achieve the vision outlined in this Plan.

As an essential starting point, the following steps should be taken:

- A new Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health should be established as a focal point for expanding and enhancing mental health research and its application in the province
- Detailed plans for the appropriate leadership, coordination and advisory functions should be developed, with the AMHB coordinating collaboration among RHAs, academic institutions, consumer organizations, and other key stakeholders

Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health

A central focal point for advancing mental health research in the province is essential. It is unlikely this can be achieved without some form of "centre" or nucleus to bring together the various components of the mental health research plan and ensure that action is taken.

The idea is not to create a large structure responsible for mental health research in the province, but to build on existing capacity and resources and organize a core of dedicated expertise which would be available to deliver the extensive mental health research services required to implement The Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta on an ongoing basis. The AMHB has made a commitment, in principle, to take the lead in establishing the Centre, in collaboration with other willing partners. Other potential contributors include the post-secondary sector (particularly the university research community), the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, and other key stakeholders including RHAs.

The Centre would strive to focus, coordinate and complement existing provincial resources and to provide research services in consultation with the RHAs, government and community agencies and programs. While there would be a small complement of staff attached to the Centre, the Centre would also be expected to mobilize and engage expertise from a variety of sources including universities, RHAs, Aboriginal and multicultural communities, and other organizations as necessary.

A key component of the Centre would be the establishment of a dedicated academic unit involving both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta, and potentially other post-secondary institutions in the province. The unit would include funded faculty positions as well as associated personnel and infrastructure. The dedicated academic unit would provide researchers with exciting opportunities for applied research, help to attract peer-reviewed operating funds from provincial and national sources, produce publications in the national and international mental health literature, and provide a rich academic environment for training the next generation of mental health researchers. Another function of the unit would be to collaborate with RHAs and other stakeholders as well as provide epidemiological, evaluation, outcomes and services delivery research information and assistance on mental health. Finally, a prestigious academic unit would provide a home for, and assist with the recruitment of Mental Health Chairs.

Research functions of the Centre

Coordinating and implementing the Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta

- Facilitating and supporting multi-stakeholder planning and priority-setting
- Communications, public relations and advocacy
- Liaison with other initiatives of the *Provincial Mental Health Plan* including the Human Resources plan, the Strategic Data Assessment Project, the Aboriginal Mental Health Framework, and others as appropriate
- Secretariat support for the regional health authority and academic capacity-building programs
- Leveraging current and new resources for mental health research in Alberta
- Promoting efficiencies and reducing obstacles to mental health research
- Establishing, expanding and facilitating an Alberta Mental Health Research Network

  Linking the Alberta mental health research community (e.g. researchers in universities, people involved in service delivery, government, consumer groups and advocates, practitioners, the Aboriginal community, etc.)

  Facilitating the Network through a variety of mechanisms including a database of researchers and their research, a website, a newsletter, and special events

  Fostering research dissemination and knowledge mobilization
- Providing linkages and developing partnerships

  Providing linkages with various government ministries, cross-ministry initiatives, health sectors, Aboriginal governments and communities, consumer organizations, community agencies and programs, and diverse cultural groups

  Providing linkages with various international, inter-provincial, federal, industry and private sector initiatives related to mental health and mental health research

  Establishing a referral and facilitation service to respond to specific requests to link the research, education and practice communities

  Providing networking and partnership enhancement opportunities for mental health researchers and students
- Staging an Annual Mental Health Research Showcase

  To feature mental health research in all four pillars that is relevant to other researchers, clinicians, system leaders, consumers and policy makers

  To provide opportunities for RHAs and community agencies and programs to showcase practice based research and innovative practices

  To encourage information exchange and enable the establishment of collaborative networks that will diminish the gaps between research, practice and policy

Facilitating knowledge transfer

- Providing rapid response support for evidence-based decision making in practice and policy
- Working with RHAs and key stakeholders to support the development of a culture of research
- Defining and disseminating information about leading practices including:

  Leading practice reviews

  Research syntheses

  Research toolkits and templates

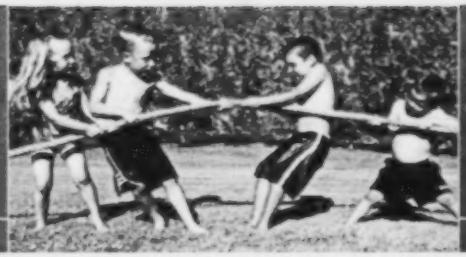
  A repository (database) of leading practice research
- Maintaining an inventory of research and researchers in Alberta and Western Canada
- Providing needs assessments
- Developing collaborative knowledge transfer projects
- Providing access to key statistics and data
- Providing library services (e.g. access to the Health Knowledge Network)

Providing expert consultation services including:

- Expert advisory support for the range of knowledge transfer services
- Research methodology planning and proposal development, including indigenous methodologies
- Program evaluation methodology

Sponsoring and initiating applied research

- Addressing specific applied research questions at the system, region, or population-specific level



Support functions

Secretariat support

- Providing assistance in identifying needs, planning, and priority-setting
- Evaluating and assessing outcomes of the Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta

Management of research funding initiatives

- Developing and operating systems to structure and administer calls for research proposals, receipt of proposals, peer review, evaluation and selection, structuring of funding agreements, disbursement of funds, receipt of progress reports, and associated accountability requirements

Operational and financial management and accountability

- Developing, documenting and providing ongoing management of contractual relationships among organizations involved in mental health research
- Coordinating the application of resources, communications, logistical and administrative support
- Developing, operating and maintaining systems for stewardship of funding, financial transactions, financial accounting, and reporting

Information technology management

- Acquiring, operating and maintaining computer hardware and software systems required for financial management, database management, and communications
- Ensuring that appropriate mechanisms and procedures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of information

Leadership, coordination and advisory functions

Appropriate mechanisms and structures are required to ensure that the necessary leadership, coordination and advisory functions are addressed. In part, the specific structures and mechanisms that are required will depend on a number of related factors including: how the proposed Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health is established, who it is accountable to, how the proposed Mental Health Research Fund is established and where it is housed.

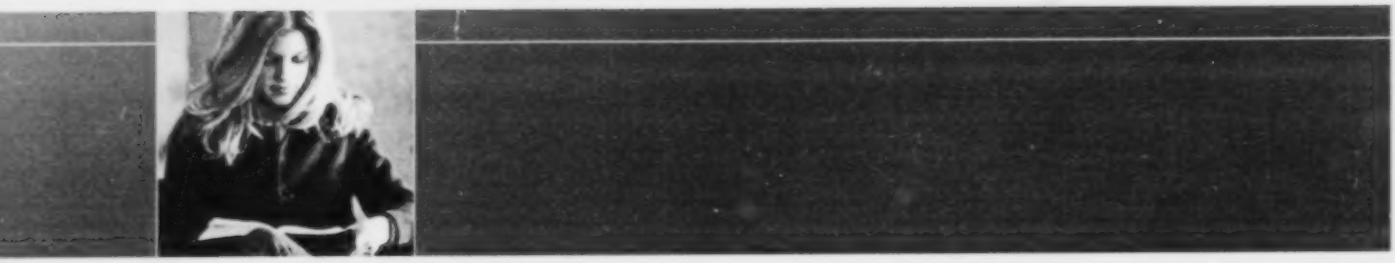
As a basic requirement, however, any structures that are developed should address the need to engage key stakeholders in:

- Providing overall leadership and direction for implementation of the Alberta Mental Health Research Program on an ongoing basis
- Providing input into planning and setting priorities for a province-wide Mental Health Research Program
- Facilitating research partnerships that honour and respond to the priorities of the Aboriginal community, consumer organizations, and diverse cultural groups
- Reviewing progress in implementing the Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta and recommending adjustments to priorities as necessary
- Providing linkages with the Provincial Mental Health Council, Alberta Health and Wellness, and other key organizations involved in mental health and mental health research

In addition to these overall requirements, specific advisory committees should be established to:

- Oversee and provide advice on activities related to establishing and enhancing RHA capacity and mechanisms for review, selection and approval for funding specific mental health research projects
- Provide advice and direction on the academic research component of the Mental Health Research Program
- Provide high level, independent, objective scientific expertise on an ongoing basis, e.g. through a Scientific Advisory Committee

Given the mandate for mental health research outlined in the *Provincial Mental Health Plan*, the AMHB should facilitate the development of the appropriate mechanisms and structures in consultation with RHAs, the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, academic institutions, and other key stakeholders. Detailed plans for the necessary structures and advisory bodies should be completed during the start-up phase for implementation of the Mental Health Research Program.



How would funding be provided?

As noted earlier in this plan, funding for mental health research and capacity building in the province does not reflect the incidence of mental illness in the province or the impact of mental illness on individuals, families, communities and the workplace. Mental health also has not been a top priority for health-related research in the province and the capacity of health regions to use research to guide decisions and improve outcomes varies widely across the province.

To address these issues, a dedicated Mental Health Research Fund is required. In addition, key stakeholders in mental health should be expected to contribute directly and indirectly to build the capacity for using, choosing and creating mental health research.

Mental Health Research Fund

A dedicated Mental Health Research Fund is essential to expand and enhance mental health research capacity in Alberta and to achieve the vision outlined in the Mental Health Research Program.

The Mental Health Research Fund would be dedicated to supporting mental health research in the province, promoting evidence-based decision making, and improving the outcomes for people with mental illnesses as well as the overall mental health of Albertans. The Fund would particularly foster and support collaborative, multi-disciplinary, cross-boundary research.

The Mental Health Research Fund should be structured to accept and manage contributions from a broad base of potential donors.

The Mental Health Research Fund should also have the capacity to attract donations from a wide variety of sources and to leverage existing research funding. This would include targeted fund-raising efforts to support endowed Mental Health Research Chairs at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta.

Funds from the Mental Health Research Fund would be used to:

- Establish, enhance and maintain mental health research capacity in health regions and in academic institutions and support mental health research consistent with the priorities established by the Mental Health Research Leadership and Coordination Committee
- Support the operation of the Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health

Allocating funds

The following approach should be used to allocate funds for each of the major funding components:

- Overall allocations to the Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health, the academic component, and the RHA component would be made on an annual basis.
- Allocations from the RHA component and approval of specific projects would be made through a province-wide committee of RHA representatives, consumers and other key stakeholders. The Centre would provide administrative support. This committee would arrange for peer review of all proposals and make decisions on which ones qualify for capacity building, innovation fund, and investigator-driven research funding. RHAs would be accountable for how funds are used to improve mental health services and outcomes in their respective regions.
- Allocations to academic institutions would be made through a competitive, peer-reviewed process.

RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

Additional funding sources

While the majority of support for implementation of the Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta would come from the Mental Health Research Fund, key stakeholders are also expected to contribute directly and through contributions in kind to support mental health research in the province.

Consistent with its mandate as outlined in the *Provincial Mental Health Plan*, the AMHB has agreed in principle to support this proposed plan. The AMHB will be expected to devote resources to the coordination and implementation of the Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta in conjunction with other partners. Other principal partners who will be asked to contribute resources in funding and/or in kind include: Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Universities of Alberta and Calgary, the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, and RHAs. It is recognized that some RHAs are in a position to make a direct financial contribution to the implementation of the research program while others are not.

Details of the respective contributions of the funding partners, as well as the specific division of roles and responsibilities, will need to be addressed by the partners, each of which must fulfill its own specific mandates and accountability requirements. The AMHB is prepared to lead these discussions.

Once it is established, provisions should be made to raise charitable donations and endowments and to leverage funding from other sources such as national and international sponsors of mental health research.

Initial estimates have been developed for the full implementation of the Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta.

The Mental Health Research Program for Alberta will have to be phased in over time, on a flexible schedule that will depend on progress in developing partnership agreements and securing funding commitments. Individual funding agencies may target their financial contributions to specific elements of the Program, consistent with the priorities and accountabilities of individual funders.

Funds would be required on an annual basis to sustain full implementation of the Mental Health Research Program for Alberta. Allocations of this funding might be attributed as follows, subject to the availability of sufficient funding, as well as terms and conditions applied by the funding agencies:

- Establishing, enhancing and maintaining capacity in service settings – 35%
- Enhancing capacity for mental health research in academic institutions – 35%
- Supporting the functions of the Alberta Research Centre for the Advancement of Mental Health, including strategic and operational management, coordination and linkages, knowledge transfer, and consultative services – 27%
- Supporting the necessary administration and support functions for the Research Program – 3%

Additional funding initiatives

In addition to the core annual funding, targeted capital funding would need to be raised to establish endowed Chairs in Mental Health Research at the University of Alberta and University of Calgary. Specific fund-raising initiatives would be required to create the endowment fund. The endowment would be invested, and the proceeds used to sustain the Chairs.

IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Implementation of the Plan for a Mental Health Research Program for Alberta would occur on a phased-in basis. The AMHB will lead the implementation with the collaboration of key stakeholders as of April 1, 2005.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Evaluation is a critical component in a responsive, accountable system that strives to support and enhance mental health outcomes. As identified in the Provincial Mental Health Plan, "Throughout the health care system, there should be a strong commitment to continuous improvement. That requires ongoing evaluation and consistent measurement of performance and results."[18] Performance monitoring and outcome evaluation will be critical to the effectiveness of the Mental Health Research Program and to the achievement of its vision, to become a world leader in advancing leading practice and innovation.

While the need for accountability of research investment dollars is clear, measurement of processes and outcomes that gauge research impact remains sporadic.[19] Albertans have a unique opportunity in the context of an integrated research program for evaluation and performance monitoring across program initiatives directed at mental health.

Systematic evaluation of the program will represent a significant Alberta-based innovation in the demonstration of accountability for outcomes of mental health research. One implication is that future priority-setting for the program will be informed via the comprehensive evaluation of program elements, which may in turn serve as a model for other health research programs.

[18] Advancing the Mental Health Agenda: A Provincial Mental Health Plan for Alberta. P. viii

[19] Canadian Health Services Research Foundation [homepage on the Internet]. Available from: http://www.chsrf.ca/home_e.php

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